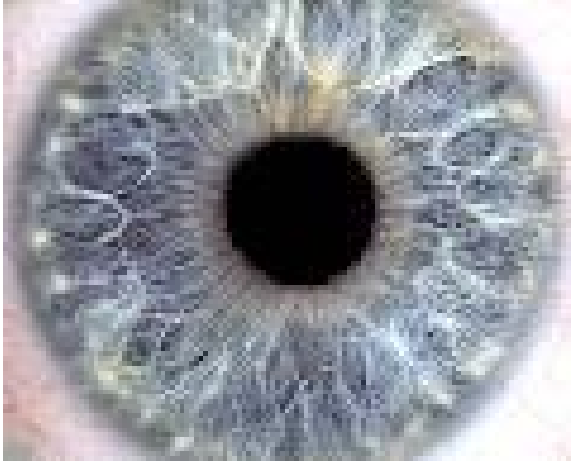


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Sir John Daugman and Charles Dickens

By John Perrault

How do you "curate" site-specific artworks?

I wanted nominees and participant artists who had demonstrated they could work with historic structures and had already tackled the site-specific mode.

Jeffrey Mongrain, known to me for his sculptures placed in cathedrals such as St. John the Divine in New York, here has offered up *The Iris of Sir John Daugman*. In a break from his minimalist output, Mongrain connects the tracery of the "ocular" window in Cell # 9 in Cell Block 2 -- and thus all the windows in the cells -- to the framing of the clock in the tower of Philadelphia City Hall. In his ceramic tracery he implanted a photo blowup of the left iris of Sir John Daugman, who the handout identifies as "the inventor of the iris-scanning technology used for security identification at international airports." One can see the iris skylight through an angled mirror below.

On the basis of her site-specific sculpture for the historic Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue in New York's Chinatown, I knew that Judy Moonelis -- another artist I have followed over the years -- would be perfect for the project, particularly if she choose ESP as her site, which she did.

She began by investigating the history of women inmates incarcerated at the penitentiary from 1831-1923. The space she choose had been the laundry, where many of the women had been allowed to work. In *Blood Cell*, the forms that stretch out on the rubble-strewn floor are based on the human circulatory system and its capillary beds, rhyming with the roots, branches and moss that have invaded the space.



Moonelis' *Brain Cell* was inspired by Charles Dickens, who visited Eastern State in 1842 and "perceived the invisible damage inflicted by the solitary confinement approach," describing it as the "slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain." Moonelis' hanging forms are imaginary models of the neural injury caused by isolation.



Was it an accident that both my candidates previously had made site-specific work for houses of worship? I don't think so. Like churches and temples, ESP is public architecture, but turned inside-out.

Eastern State Penitentiary is a house of worship; its god is The State or The Law or The Demon of Public Order and Tranquility -- the God of Silence.

*He does not stare upon the air
Through a little roof of glass;
He does not pray with lips of clay
For his agony to pass;
Nor feel upon his shuddering cheek
The kiss of Caiaphas.
From Oscar Wilde: *The Ballad of Reading Gaol**